

Getting Ready

*I am offering my **Guide to Getting Ready** as a reminder that we all need to be prepared for disaster. I hope you will use the tips it provides, and I encourage you to share it with your family and friends*

Following the news of a natural disaster, most of us think that we should prepare for just such an event, but the thought goes no further and we end up doing little or nothing to prepare. Getting ready is not difficult and could help you and your family survive a serious disaster. Most experts agree that it is essential for you to be self-sufficient for 72 hours following a serious disaster.

This handy guide is meant to encourage you to take the steps necessary to be ready. And, as steps, you can take them one at a time until you are prepared.

Barbara Baker

Getting ready Step One: Stocking Up

Water

Experts agree that the most essential item to have on hand is water. You should have one gallon per person per day, or at least three gallons for each person for your three days of self-sufficiency. If you have pets, add water for them. You might also consider packing a water purification device sold for backpackers. These devices can produce limited supplies of drinking water from questionable sources.

Food

A variety of compact food that requires no refrigeration and little preparation is best. Some examples include canned meats, fruits, vegetables, and juices; nonperishable cereals; high-energy bars; and vitamins. Another alternative is to store backpacking food or other near-ready-to-eat meals. You should also include special food for infants or pets if appropriate. And remember to add in a can opener, a sharp knife or two, a cook pot and some plastic plates and cups. A small camp stove or several cans of Sterno or other fuel can help to make your meals more palatable.

First aid kit

A first aid kit should include nonprescription drugs for pain, diarrhea, vomiting, and constipation. Some antiseptic and bandages should also be included. Be sure to add a supply of all prescription medication used by each member of your family.

Clothing

Include a change of clothing and comfortable shoes for each person. You should also include some rain gear and a jacket for each person.

Tools and Lighting

You should include some simple tools, including rope or heavy cord. A shovel should be included in case you need to direct flooding or dig a latrine. Flashlights with a supply of batteries will provide light without the threat of fire. You should also include some matches. Many experts advise to tying an appropriately sized wrench to your gas meter so it is immediately available in case of a gas line break.

Radio

Include a battery-operated radio that uses the same batteries as your flashlights. Also available are radios that have winding devices in case your batteries run low. There are solar-powered battery rechargers available.

Fire Extinguisher

Add a fire extinguisher and make sure you know how to use it. Reading instructions after a fire breaks out is never a good idea.

Comfort

Some blankets or sleeping bags should go into your kit, along with tarps or plastic sheeting for rain protection.

Sanitary supplies

Include toilet paper, towelettes, soap, liquid detergent, and other personal hygiene items. Remember to add diapers and baby supplies if appropriate.

Money

It is likely that banks and ATMs will not operate after a significant disaster. Add some cash to your kit, include several denominations of bills and a few rolls of coins.

An evacuation bag

Experts agree that you may need to leave your property. Having a bag with a small number of essential items in a backpack is a good idea. Your backpack (or other carry container) should contain:

- a small amount of water and food, and a can opener
- a flashlight
- a battery-powered radio
- batteries for both the flashlight and radio
- a whistle
- medications and prescriptions
- extra keys to your house and vehicle
- walking shoes, a jacket and rain poncho
- toilet paper and other hygiene supplies
- a paper and pencil for messages
- cash, including coins

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Step Two: Discussions

All families should have agreed-upon plans for what to do in case of emergencies. An evacuation route should be mapped out and practiced. All adults should know where the disaster kit is kept and how to access it. Everyone should agree on who will be responsible for evacuating children or adults who cannot evacuate on their own.

Many families may find themselves separated when a disaster strikes. You may not be able to communicate with one another following an event, so an agreed-upon plan is important. Adults may be at work. Children may be at school. Parents should talk with their children's school administrators about the school's evacuation plan and about who can have children released from school.

Likewise, adults should agree on who will be responsible for picking up children from school.

Many experts agree that local phones and cell phones may not operate for several days after a major disaster. However, even if you are unable to contact one another, you all may be able to call a friend or relative in another state. Agree on who that person will be, let that person know that they may get calls, and ask him or her to serve as your prime emergency contact. You could also agree to serve as their contact. Give that person a checklist with important contact numbers. Some types of older telephones don't need electricity to work. If the phone lines are operating, you may be able to use one of these phones.

Children may be especially traumatized by a disaster. Talking with them both before and after an event is important. Tell your children that you may be separated for a time, but that a plan will be in place to assure their safety. Let them know that school officials are trained and able to take care of them, even overnight. Tell them that they should follow the instructions of their school officials and not to leave until you are there to pick them up. And let them know that you will get to them as soon as is safe to do so. Children may also worry about what may happen to their pets. Assure them that a plan is in place to keep everyone as safe as possible.

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Step Three: Getting Organized

Disaster preparedness is a good way to organize your neighborhood. You may want to talk with your neighbors or even organize a meeting to talk about how to get ready and about any special needs they may have. You may discover that some of your neighbors have elderly relatives in their homes who may need assistance in evacuating. You might be asked to feed a neighbor's pets. Or you may be able to ask your neighbors to turn off your gas if you are at work.

In several recent disasters, there have been reports of neighbors working together to set up rescue crews, establish communal kitchens, share nonprescription medications, build rain structures and other projects. A discussion prior to any real disaster can streamline this organization and make better and safer neighborhoods.

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Step Four: Branching Out

You and your family may not be at home when a disaster strikes. It is a very good idea for you to take steps to be prepared when you are away.

In your car:

You can have a small disaster kit in your car that includes some water, some non-perishable food, a spare pair of comfortable walking shoes, a flashlight and battery-powered radio and some batteries. If you take prescription medication, you might want to store a few extra doses in this portable kit.

At work:

Find out whether your office has an emergency kit for all employees. If not, encourage the development of such a kit that would include water, a first aid kit, flashlights, a battery-operated radio and some tools. You should also stock your desk with some non-perishable food, an extra pair of comfortable shoes, a jacket and necessary prescription medication. Encourage your fellow staffers to do the same and share tips about what they should put away. All offices should also have evacuation plans and a set of emergency numbers for police and fire. It is also a good idea to keep a paper roster of all staff, including home and emergency contact numbers.

Your children:

Talk with your children's school or child care provider about its disaster preparedness plan. Know what will happen in case of an emergency and whether there is a designated evacuation location for the school. If your child takes prescription medication, ask about how several doses may be stored in the nurse's office and the procedure to ensure that your child will get medication during an emergency.

For the on-line version of this guide go to:

<http://boxer.senate.gov/gettingready.cfm>

For more information about emergency preparedness go to:

www.fema.gov/areyouready

www.72hours.org